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U.S. Says Navy Has Completed Libyan Exercise

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WASHINGTON, March 27 — The Reagan Administration announced today that Navy ships and planes had completed their exercise in the Gulf of Sidra and had moved north of the gulf region.

During the operation, American ships had operated in the gulf, south of Col. Muammar el-Qaddafi's "line of death," the northern boundary of the gulf, for 75 hours and Navy planes flew 188 sorties in the gulf area, Defense Secretary Caspar W. Weinberger said today.

Administration officials said that the three American aircraft carriers and the 127 ships accompanying them were taking up new positions in the Mediterranean Sea north of the gulf.

The carrier battle groups are expected to stay in the region for at least several days so that they would be in position to counter Libya should Colonel Qaddafi, its leader, order reprisal attacks or military raids, officials said.

To Hold Libya 'Responsible'

President Reagan said in a speech in New Orleans that if Libya engaged in terrorist attacks on Americans, the United States would hold Libya "fully responsible."

President Reagan, in a telephone conversation with the commander of the Sixth Fleet said that it "has once again served as the spear and shield of American policy in a troubled and volatile region."

Meanwhile, Administration officials said that Vice Adm. Frank B. Kelso 2d, commander of the fleet, was the leading candidate of Mr. Reagan to become Chief of Naval Operations, the highest post in the Navy.

The White House released the text of a Presidential letter today that was sent to Congress on Wednesday, which explained the operations in the Gulf of Sidra area. This was done in lieu of a notification to Congress under the War Powers Act.

Weinberger Discusses Operation

Defense Secretary Weinberger briefly appeared before reporters and discussed the operation in general terms.

Mr. Weinberger said the exercise was "in every way a successful operation" in that attacks were ward off without loss of life or damage to American planes or ships.

Admiral Crowe said the Libyans had made extensive efforts to jam United States equipment electronically. "We operated in an intense electronic environment but it did not hinder our own operations," he said.

United States planes first entered the gulf on Sunday afternoon at 4:30 Eastern standard time. Three United States ships crossed into the gulf Monday at 6 A.M. Eastern standard time.

During the five days of exercises, United States forces carried out five attacks on Libyan missile patrol boats that were deemed to be menacing United States ships.

The Pentagon has confirmed that two of the ships were seriously damaged.

Navy planes also twice attacked radars at a Libyan SAM-5 missile site at Sidra. Pentagon officials said today there were signs that the missile radar was operational again. Officials said that a second SAM-5 missile site at Benghazi might also be operational soon.

Soviet Steps Described

The three United States ships operating in the gulf today moved north of the "line of death" at 10 A.M., officials said. The three ships were the Ticonderoga, an Aegis air defense cruiser, and two destroyers, the Scott and the Caron. The Caron carries extensive intelligence equipment and recently prompted a Soviet protest when it moved into Soviet waters in the Black Sea.

Government officials, familiar with intelligence reports, said the Soviet Union had taken steps during the exercise to avoid an unintended confrontation with American forces.

They said the Soviet Union had moved its submarines out of the area to avoid the risk that its craft would be mistaken for six Libyan submarines and come under attack. As it turned out, the Libyan submarines, which were Soviet-made Foxtrot submarines never left port.

The officials said intelligence information suggested that the Soviet Union did not provide "real-time" or immediate intelligence information, to the Libyans on the American fleet.

4 Soviet Ships

The Soviet Union maintained four ships in the Mediterranean. But intelligence reports suggested that the Soviet ships had communicated directly with headquarters at Sevastopol and did not communicate directly with a Soviet submarine tender that was docked at Tripoli.

Colonel Qaddafi has said the Libyan armed forces would carry out target practice in the Mediterranean. But Mr. Weinberger said that all of the Libyan naval and air units had been "pulled back in, so it'll take them some time, I guess, to get out there."

During the exercise, the Libyans fired at least five SAM-5 anti-aircraft missiles and one SAM-2 anti-aircraft missiles at United States planes, Pentagon officials said.

The officials said today that United States planes were never seriously endangered by the missiles.

Said to Be Out of Range

They said that the SAM-5 missiles were most effective at a range of 75 miles or less and that United States planes were generally out of the range of the missiles.

They said that E-6 Prowler aircraft with jamming equipment had been operating in the area. The equipment can send out signals that create false targets and may have deceived the Libyans into thinking the American planes were closer to the missile site.

The Libyan Air Force was never very active during the exercises. Mr. Weinberger said today that on the first day of the United States exercise two Libyan MIG-25 planes came no closer than 125 nautical miles to United States ships.

"And thereafter the skies in the Gulf of Sidra were clear of any Libyan planes, and the Libyan planes confined themselves to patrolling on land and going over the desert," Mr. Weinberger told reporters.

Pentagon officials said one reason that Libyan planes stayed clear of the area was to avoid being struck by Libyan SAM-5 missiles. Two Libyan planes were shot down by United States Navy F-14's in 1981 after one fired on the Navy planes.

Mr. Weinberger said that the purpose of the exercise was not to settle a score with Libya but was intended to demonstrate the freedom of navigation.

But White House advisers have said that the exercise was planned because President Reagan felt that Colonel Qaddafi had failed to heed the Administration's message that it would not tolerate Libyan sponsored terrorist attacks.

In his remarks to Admiral Kelso, Mr. Reagan said that the Sixth Fleet had "sent a message to the whole world that the United States has the will, and through you, the ability to defend the free world's interests." Mr. Reagan also said that the Sixth Fleet had upheld "the fundamental principle of freedom of the seas."

The operations constituted the 19th naval exercise that the United States has carried out in the area since 1981. It was the eighth time that the United States has operated below the 32-30 north latitude line that forms the northern boundary of the Gulf of Sidra.